

Basic Characteristics of Life Development Stages

	GROWTH	CONFLICT	MATURITY	RESOLUTION
AWARENESS	<p style="text-align: center;">INFANCY Birth - 5 Years</p> <p>Infants live in the present in a bonded state of absolute dependence with mother as the provider of all needs. The infant's relationship to its mother will change rapidly as the infant develops mobility, but the mother's relationship as nurturer to the infant will not.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">INDIVIDUALITY 20 - 25 Years</p> <p>The fundamentals of taste in music, clothing, partners, and personal concepts such as what is attractive or sexy are set here. However, just as your personal identity is emerging you take on other social identities: employee, spouse, and/or parent. The value in learning tilts from <i>Experience</i> to <i>Utility</i>.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">SELF-AWARENESS 40 - 45 Years</p> <p>This is a nuanced, experienced, and edited version of the individual at 23. Depending on the degree of change necessary to bring the mature self into alignment this process can be dramatic or simple. The final shakeout will fall back to more nuanced preferences confirmed in the early 20s.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">REFLECTION 60 - 65 years</p> <p>This stage marks the beginning of a search for meaning. A renewed interest in religion of youth or popular philosophy or spirituality is common. Value is found in experiences such as non-utilitarian learning, travel, and personal development. As in childhood, goods are valued for their <i>Affiliation</i>.</p>
LEARNING	<p style="text-align: center;">CHILDHOOD 5 - 10 Years</p> <p>Children are experiential learning machines, gathering and manipulating data until all possibilities are exhausted, then moving on (play.) The nature of play limits long-term brand loyalty. Children look to role models to validate discoveries. Value in consumer goods lies in <i>Affiliation</i>.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ALLIANCE 25 - 30 Years</p> <p>The learning stage of a long period of conflict and resolution between the individual and overlaying social identities. Shared meals emerge as an important social collaboration for gauging relationships. Value of consumer goods lies in <i>Validation</i> of rapidly evolving social mobility.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">READJUSTMENT 45 - 50 Years</p> <p>The learning stage of the maturity period. Products and practices that do not fit are dropped. There is a new openness to new alliances and ideas compatible with examined and refined values. Consistency and reliability are high priority values.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">RECOGNITION 65 - 70 Years</p> <p>The learning stage of the resolution period. Practices and products that do not meet the new standards of core value for cost (money or spiritual) are dropped. Brand loyalty for valued products is fixed unless the product changes or cost increases negate value.</p>
RECONCILIATION	<p style="text-align: center;">PRE-ADOLESCENCE 10 - 15 Years</p> <p>The first nostalgia age as children look to establish lifelong values. Pre-adolescents work to strike a balance between present & future states, actively seeking new role models while finding security and investing value in the icons of childhood.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">PRACTICE 30 - 35 Years</p> <p>As life gets more complex, imbalances come to the fore. This period marks the second nostalgia age as icons of childhood re-emerge as symbols of value. The core values of nostalgia are reliability, consistency, and security.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">MASTERY 50 - 55</p> <p>The third nostalgia age as we reflect on life's path. A period of fine-tuning of alliances and practices. The editing-out process is rapid. As social mobility slows, acquisition of goods also slows. Value is found by a return to a nuanced version of the childhood play stage of <i>Experience</i>.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ACCOMMODATION 70 - 75 Years</p> <p>The final fine-tuning period of stripping away what doesn't work and valuing what does. A sense of freedom not experienced since childhood drives us to explore for intrinsic motivation alone. Nostalgia is commonly expressed in unfavorable comparison of the present to the past.</p>
TRANSFORMATION	<p style="text-align: center;">ADOLESCENCE 15-20 Years</p> <p>The emergent identity is driven to sever the dependent relationship with the parent. Validation shifts from parent to peer group. Self-testing and the "trying on" of mediated identities drives both the consumer good and experience markets.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">EVALUATION 35 - 40 Years</p> <p>A time of identity-driven separation similar to the adolescent stage. A period of re-examination of the web of relationships that comprise the social whole, with a rejection of those that do not fit the individual identity.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">RE-EVALUATION 55 - 60</p> <p>A third period of re-examination of identity based on the realization that you are now most likely operating at maximum capability in all areas of your life. Value is placed on understanding and security. De-accessioning consumer goods begins.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ACCEPTANCE 75 +</p> <p>A period of confirmation of identity and an acceptance that some things are beyond your control. Intrinsic reward is high value: learning, continuity (sharing experiences with grandchildren), self-actualization, etc.</p>



From Merchandise to Meaning The Economic implications of Human Development

A large body of work by both physiologists and psychologists documents the evolution of human needs over a lifespan. By comparing this to the consistent cultural patterns of behavior over time, it is possible to develop a complete and accurate blueprint of the process of our development as decision-making beings.

We are a species that continues to learn and adapt throughout our entire lifespan, a process that is not linear, but cyclical. It is a repeating progression of learning, applying, adapting, and transforming. Modern humans go through at least three transformation stages at predictable points in their lifetime.

We imprint on values when they first stir emotions – nurturing from infancy, basic values from childhood, music from teenage years, fashion from the mate-seeking period. As we move from one developmental stage to another we edit our mental database, dropping what no longer works, making and testing new discoveries, adding information that is found to be useful in our new operating environment, and developing new recognition patterns for what is desirable and necessary.

This editing process occurs in progressive stages of development: Awareness, Learning, Reconciliation, and Transformation, each lasting an average of five years. As we edit, we reprioritize our values – such as when we exchange the freedom of individuality for the compromise and commitment of family. Freedom is still a value, but others have moved up in priority.

In addition, every twenty years we go through what can be thought of, in computer terms, as a “systems upgrade.” These twenty-year cycles are identified as Growth (birth-age 19), Conflict (ages 20-40), Maturity (ages 40-60), and Resolution (ages 60+). We emerge from the transformation age of each cycle as a distinctive new entity: from teenager to young adult, from young adult to maturity, from maturity to a cycle of reflection and resolution of the contradictions of our own identity.

Each transformation carries economic consequences. The ages 19 to 35 are the hot demographic for consumer sales because these are the most socially mobile years in American life. Just as teens develop an identity independent from the parents, they immediately have several other identities thrust upon them in rapid succession – student, employee, peer-group member, partner, parent.

During this period, you can be – as far as your brain is concerned – a different person every few months. When our mental image of ourselves changes, our environment must change around us to validate and reflect our new self-image. Therefore a majority of people between the ages of 19 and 35, as socially mobile beings, are more inclined to buy a new and wider range of material goods as they try on new identities than someone who is self-actualized and has a relatively stable self-image.

Once Americans go through their second transformation into mature adulthood their mobility slows as they possess a more complete sense of self. The buying of material

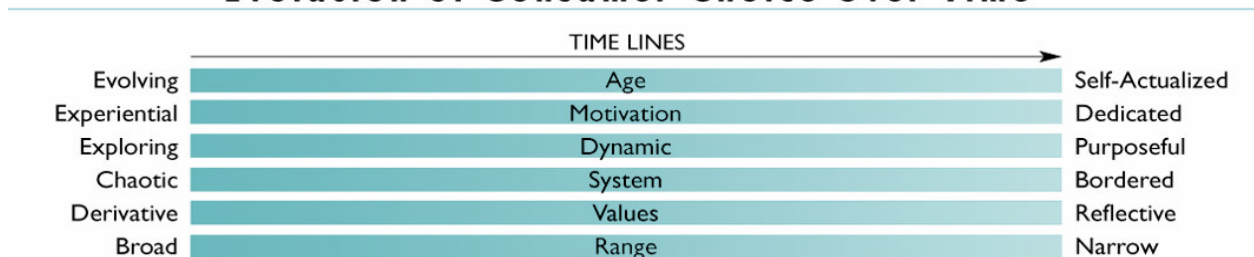
goods slows; we only replace, and so may skip whole generations of technology - as from a tape deck to a mp3 player, bypassing CDs entirely. But while the material goods around us remains relatively stable, we start buying self-affirming *experiences* and will continue to do so until we go through their next transformation stage, when we start searching out and buying *meaning*.

At every stage of this process, brand loyalty can disappear when the consumer moves into a new development stage where the values originally perceived in the product no longer hold high priority.

Reconciliation stages (10 - 15, 30 - 35, 50 - 55, and 70 - 75) are particularly significant for marketing. During these periods our brain is subconsciously preparing for transformation by scanning for significant patterns of the group ahead, and also scanning behind for significant moments in the past. Thus you find pre-teens at Disneyland rushing to test themselves against the roller-coasters of Splash, Space, and Big Thunder Mountains, but they also equally gravitate to, in the words of one 11-year-old, “the stuff I liked as a kid.” (Eavesdropping on groups of 15-year old boys trying to reconcile being “cool” while justifying to each other why they feel compelled to ride Peter Pan’s Flight is very enlightening, not to mention incredibly entertaining.) This backscanning process makes the 10-15-year age group a key player in building brand awareness and loyalty.

Age stage determines not only which values the consumer is drawn to, but how those values are recognized and used. The definer of how values are perceived is tied in to the level of self-actualization of the perceiver. “Self-actualization” is simply a strong positive sense of who you are – your likes, dislikes and capabilities. It is a positive viewpoint (you know who you are) rather than the negative viewpoint (you know who you don’t want to be) of early adulthood. Most people reach this stage after the transformation from the age stages of Conflict to Maturity in their early forties.

Evolution of Consumer Choice Over Time



Prior to Maturity, values tend to be viewed as derivative – “I’m cool because I’m wearing this jacket.” After Maturity values tend to be reflective – “This looks like me.”

Understanding age as a process, rather than an event, not only tells you why the majority of any particular age pod behaves the way they do and what they will buy; it also makes it possible to predict where they are going and what they will gravitate to in the future.



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